

DIRECT MARKETING STRATEGIES CULINARY AND AGRITOURISM



Family farms have a long tradition of offering a taste of farm life to travelers. From cider pressing and seasonal farm stands to harvest festivals and pumpkin patches, farms offer a range of unique experiences. With the growth in farm-to-table eating, interest in where products come from, and a search for authentic experiences linked to food and culture, the connection between agritourism and culinary tourism is tighter than ever. There is an abundance of opportunity for farms to expand or diversify by offering culinary agritourism experiences to guests and customers.

This factsheet includes information on:

- Agritourism and culinary tourism.
- Regulations and other considerations.
- Benefits and challenges.
- Additional resources.

Agritourism and Culinary Tourism

Generally agritourism is any recreational, entertainment, or educational activity on a farm or ranch offered to visitors from the general public that generates supplemental income for the farmer or rancher.

Agritourism activities include historic, cultural, and on-site educational programs; recreational farming programs that may include on-site hospitality services; guided and self-guided tours; petting zoos; farm festivals; corn mazes; harvest-your-own operations; hayrides; barn parties; horseback riding; fishing; and camping.

A closely related tourism subsector is culinary tourism, which the Alberta Culinary Tourism Alliance has described as, "The pursuit of unique and memorable food and drinking experiences." Culinary agritourism brings these two types of experiences together in a traveler's authentic interaction with farmers, growers, and chefs that lead to the discovery of geographically distinctive food and drink.

Agritourism can be a central, year-round part of a farm's business plan, or it can be an occasional activity like inviting CSA members out to the farm for

one or two farm-days a year. Farms may choose to add agritourism offerings in shoulder seasons as an opportunity for income when the farm is less busy. For example, the first harvest of a particular fruit or vegetable, or the release of a cheese made with the milk from animals on spring pasture, are reasons to create an event that will bring visitors to the farm for an experience. Be sure to have products ready for them to purchase and take home. People will leave having learned or experienced something they will take home and talk about to friends and family. They will also have deepened their relationship with the farm and a culinary sense of place.

When considering the addition of agritourism to your business model, it's important to think about how serving guests will fit into your other primary farming activities.

Offer Experiences and Know Your Target Market

While "foodies" may seem like the most obvious customer base, be creative in your research and thinking about who is a good fit for the products and experiences you have to offer. Families with children, teenagers, clubs or civic groups, seniors, and eco and adventure tourists are all candidates for trips to your farm.

Culinary and agricultural tourists do not fit a single profile. They may be Europeans on a weeks-long road trip to discover the American West, gourmet diners seeking a chef-prepared meal on a farm, or a hands-on course in cheese making or butchery. They may be an urban family looking for rural experience for their kids or young professionals seeking a weekend farm-stay getaway. They may be people seeking a creative outlet through learning about floral design using local blooms or how to work with natural fibers. What all of these customers have in common is the desire to have an experience that feels special and is authentic to the place they are visiting. Tapping into people's interest in "farm life" and "real food," culinary and agritourism focus on celebrating the sense of place; the local "terroir," and traditions, artisan techniques, and varieties or breeds less commonly seen today.

Collaboration to Become a Destination

As with other forms of farm tourism, culinary agritourism is designed to attract customers to your farm by offering products and a range of services. Collaboration with others in your community can be particularly helpful in providing a range of options that will attract visitors to your farm or region as a destination.

Consider how local farms, businesses and other recreational or entertainment activities in a region can support each other with coordinated offerings or events. Support other local farm and food businesses through partnerships. This can be as simple as featuring a local musician who can play at a farm's tasting room or annual farm dinner. Or work with local tour companies to feature local farm products on their trips or have them make a stop at your farm stand as they pass through your area. If your farm is in an area that already attracts visitors, say for outdoor recreation or wine tasting, a farm store can offer grab-n-go products, picnic supplies, or a nice place to stop and look around that meets visitors' needs.

In some regions, local businesses and attractions work together to create culinary and agricultural "trails" like the Olympic Cider Trail and the Thurston Bountiful Byway. In other regions like the Snoqualmie Valley, businesses, farms, and local organizations are working together to develop a year-round calendar of Savor Snoqualmie that highlight agricultural activities and products, along with other recreation attractions.

With the advent of non-traditional lodging options like Airbnb, Hipcamp, and VRBO, it's easier than ever for farms to advertise and host farm-stay visitors, whether as a self-serve campsite, or a room in a house or other on-farm dwelling.

The possible activities are endless: classes on cheese-making, beverage and food pairings, tastings, cooking seasonally, guided harvesting, food preservation, artisanal butchery, seed-saving classes, wild foraging farm stays, and clam digging. Farm dinners celebrating local chefs and foods are especially popular.

Regardless of your target market, advertise well and directly to the demographic you are trying to attract. Be sure to highlight your activities on your website and notify your local chamber of commerce, tourism office, visitors' center, economic development group, and "events calendars" in the local paper and community focused websites. Good signage to draw people to your farm is also important.

Regulations and other considerations

Before you begin a culinary agritourism venture, check with your appropriate local government agencies to find out what is required. There may be city and county permits required (e.g., event, temporary retail food establishment, camping), and land use zoning or building codes that apply to your location. Research this early in the planning process. Not all activities may be allowed in your particular circumstance. Getting the appropriate licenses, permits, and facilities in place may take time and add significant expense to the business startup cost.

It is also important to consider any special insurance needs when having visitors on the farm. In recognition of the value of agritourism activities to farms and rural economies, Washington State law limits the liability of farmers involved in agritourism activities. When the required warning notice is posted, an agritourism professional is not liable for unintentional injury or loss to agritourism participants resulting exclusively from any of the inherent risks of "agritourism activities."

To benefit from this protection farms must post the following language:

WARNING

Under Washington state law, there is limited liability for an injury to or death of a participant in an agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism location if such an injury or death results exclusively from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among others, risks of injury inherent to land, equipment, and animals, as well as the potential for you to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury or death. We are required to ensure that in any activity involving minor children, only age-appropriate access to activities, equipment, and animals is permitted. You are assuming the risk of participating in this agritourism activity.

This language must be printed in black letters at least one-inch tall and the sign must be posted in a clearly visible location at the entrance to the farm and also in a visible spot at the site of the agritourism activity itself. In addition, every written contract entered into by an agritourism professional for providing professional services, instruction, or rental of equipment to a participant must include this warning language, whether or not the contract involves agritourism activities on or off the farm.

The specific list of agritourism activities and other details of this rule are available on the Washington State Legislature's website, app.leg.wa.gov, by looking up RCW 4.24.832.

Farm dinners and other special events that are advertised to the general public and involve serving food on the farm will usually require additional permits from the local health department, such as a temporary food permit. A special liquor license may also be required from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board. The type of event, whether food is being prepared on-the farm or off-site, and who is doing the preparation (i.e., a chef or caterer in their own permitted kitchens or the farmer on the farm), will determine what specific permits and facilities are needed.

Other tips include using one of the online event or ticket services and getting non-refundable deposits for classes. Be sure to budget and, if possible charge, for your prep time as well as the time dedicated to the actual class, tour or event.

Benefits and Challenges

Benefits of Culinary and Agritourism

- Leverages existing assets to diversify farm revenue and generate income in your slow season.
- You set the prices and choose the number of people to allow in activities.
- Creates a compelling and convenient opportunity to sell or promote other products once people are on your farm.
- You can build a loyal customer base that appreciates your uniqueness and grows your business.
- Creates the opportunity to connect people to agriculture and rural places and cultures through new and meaningful experiences.

Challenges of Culinary and Agritourism

- It can be stressful dealing with the public on your farm, especially if there are logistical problems.
- Creating, planning, and managing an event or program requires a significant amount of time.
- Additional insurance and permits may be required.

- Once you open up your farm to the public, you have to be prepared for visitors' critiques and photos of their experience becoming public and potentially being posted online.
- Popular times of year for visitors might conflict with busy times on the farm.

If having visitors on your farm is not a good fit, consider partnering with a business, restaurant, coffee shop, winery or brewery that can feature your farm products. B&B's and restaurants may feature your farm fresh eggs, local jams, jellies, and syrups, local milk or butter and meats. Breweries may feature locally grown pub fare such as home fries and grass-fed burgers. Wineries may feature cheeses. Partnerships with chefs for classes on your farm or at their restaurant or with other businesses that have bigger marketing budgets can be really productive.

Additional Resources

- Travel Oregon and the Oregon Agritourism Network has many helpful resources for agritourism development, traveloregon.com/industry-resources
- Washington State Tourism, experiencewa.com
- Vermont Tourism Research Center has tools and agritourism resources for farmers, uvm.edu/tourismresearch
- Examples of collaborative culinary agritourism efforts to search for online: Thurston Bountiful Byway, Savor Snoqualmie, Olympic Culinary Loop, and Dig In Vermont
- The "Farm Stay Manual" published by University of Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, misa.umn.edu
- Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide" published by the USDA NRCS available by searching online.



1. Resources for Small Farms in Washington
9. Insurance
11. Direct Marketing in Washington State